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**Columbia University**  
**in the City of New York**

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

THE HISTORICAL ESSAY  
*and*  
THE CRITICAL REVIEW

Some suggestions as to their preparation,  
with examples taken from  
American history



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These directions were originally intended for home students, but those working in residence at the University can, it is thought, find something of value in them.



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## The Historical Essay

He toiled in the archives, hunting the little fact that makes the difference.

—*Professor Maitland* writing of Lord Acton.

An historical essay of from twenty-five hundred to six thousand words upon some topic selected from within a certain period or field of American history will be required of the student as a part of the term's work. It is to be based upon serious, systematic and extended investigation, and its preparation constitutes not only the most important exercise of this course of study but one of the most valuable experiences in the student's entire education. The method presently to be outlined is in general the method by which a lawyer prepares a brief, a minister a sermon or an author a book; an engineer, an advertising agent or a business expert working out a memorandum for his clients would, in part, follow a similar procedure. As one sets out upon this enterprise, therefore, it should be understood that here may be acquired a technique of inquiry which will be serviceable wherever one essays to learn the substantial truth of any matter, and a technique which the world will value and will even pay for. But most important is the understanding thus developed that the whole truth is not contained in any textbook or in any single work though it reach to several volumes. The reader finds the use and opportunity of a library, with its indexes, encyclopedias and bibliographic aids; he learns how to pick out from each book, pamphlet, report or newspaper the few small parts which bear upon his subjects; he develops the power to judge between conflicting statements and to compare the credibility of different sources. The self-respect that comes from thoroughness will in the end be his.

At the proper time and after due reflection on the course as far as he has covered it, each student is asked to express his preference for a particular subject,<sup>1</sup> submitting several titles as suggestions, but definite assignment is obtained by individual arrangement with the instructor. As soon as the student receives his assignment he will make a list of all the major works upon the subject. By consulting the card catalogue of as many libraries as are available he will ascertain what books are entered under his title, though it is unlikely that he will, by this means alone, be able to prepare a very long list, or learn much about the relative value of books. Similarly he will consult Channing, Hart and Turner's *Guide to the Study and Reading of American History*, an excellent manual with references to general and special works; C. K. Adams' *Manual of Histor-*

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1 Before selecting a subject please inform the instructor as to your library facilities. How near are you to a public library or other considerable collection of books? Has the library the principal standard works on American history? A set of the Congressional Debates, etc.? Any newspaper files? Any special collections of interest to the historian? Make yourself a force in your community for the maintenance of a good library.

ical Literature; the American Library Association's *Literature of American History*, with its supplement, which arranges works by periods and contains critical estimates of those mentioned; the *Book Review Digest* and the *Cumulative Index*; and the bibliographical essays at the end of each volume of the *American Nation Series*, the desired volume being found, if necessary, by consulting the general index under the topic studied. By using the index the student will receive much help from T. L. Bradford's *Bibliographer's Manual of American History* (5 volumes, revision of 1910), and, if he is patient and persistent, from Joseph Sabin's *Dictionary of Books relating to America*. The elaborate bibliographies in Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America* are useful for the earlier part of American history, especially in their references to available source material; the *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. VII, pp. 753-834, contains book lists for the periods of United States history, although unfortunately it includes no descriptive comment; the bibliographies at the end of each chapter in Bassett's *Short History of the United States*, Max Farrand's *Development of the United States*, the *Riverside History of the United States*, etc., refer to many modern special treatises. *Poole's Index*, the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, and the *Annual Library Index* are useful for articles in periodicals; the bibliographies at the end of articles in the *encyclopedias* will often help, especially if one consults the general index for related topics. *Appleton's* and the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, under the names of the principal persons important in relation to the subject, will suggest some titles, while McLaughlin and Hart's *Cyclopedia of American Government* and Lalor's *Cyclopedia of Political Science*, will be of service. For material published since 1902, the student should consult the *Writings of American History* edited by G. C. Griffin and others. A. P. C. Griffin has compiled a *Bibliography of American Historical Societies* and an *Index of Articles upon American Local History*. This array of bibliographical titles may seem sufficiently formidable, but if a student has access to one of the larger libraries, the curator will suggest other aids, for example in the use of public documents. Although, other things being equal, the more books available, the better the essay, no one should feel disheartened if not all the facilities here suggested can be obtained. The standard works like those of McMaster, Von Holst, Osgood, Schouler, Channing, Adams, Rhodes, Hildreth, *The American Nation Series*, etc., are usually to be had and generally a respectable number of bibliographies and special topical studies.

By all these aids the student will be enabled to gather a large number of titles of books dealing in whole or in part with his subject—perhaps thirty or forty. Each such title should be entered clearly in ink upon a separate card, together with the name of the author, the place and date of publication, a comment based upon a bibliographer's estimate (if any is found in some of the works mentioned above), upon some review appearing soon after the book's publication, or upon the student's own examination of the book, and some indication of the portion of it dealing directly with his subject.

Supposing, for example, that the student has chosen the "Missouri Compromise" as his subject, one of his cards will appear as follows:

Lucien Carr,

*Missouri: a Bone of Contention* [American Commonwealth Series] (Boston, 1899), chapters vii-ix.

50 pages devoted to subject, generally in a judicial style, though apparently somewhat resentful of anti-slavery interference.

The cards are *now to be submitted to the instructor* for his examination and advice, a part of the titles possibly being set aside as negligible, under the circumstances, a part indicated indispensable and a part recommended to be used as supplementary, if time admits. It may be that some books that have not been mentioned will occur to the instructor and he will suggest that these be sought.

The student should now read through the account recommended for the purpose, to get a broad view of the subject, and then *prepare an outline* according to the treatment which, in the light of his preliminary information, seems to be best. The following, by no means recommended as perfect or complete, is offered merely as a simple suggestion as to procedure:

#### I. Historical Background.

1. Early settlement and development of Missouri.
  - a. Origin of population.
  - b. Number and distribution.
2. Slavery in Missouri Territory.
  - a. Extent of slavery. Geographical basis of plantation economy.
  - b. Territorial law on slavery.
3. Application for admission as a state.

- II. Missouri question in 15th Congress.
  1. Balanced condition of the Union.
  2. Changing southern view of slavery
  3. Tallmadge's amendment.
    - a. Influences supporting.
    - b. Arguments for. Moral. Constitutional.
    - c. Influences opposing.
    - d. Arguments against. Moral. Constitutional (*e. g.*, provision in Louisiana treaty of equality of new states with old).
  4. Fate of Tallmadge's amendment.
  5. Public sentiment in the various sections.
- III. Missouri Question in 16th Congress.
  1. Differences in proportional strength of sections.
  2. Application of Maine.
    - a. Relation to Massachusetts.
  3. Proposal to join the two bills.
    - a. Roberts' amendment.
      - i. Discussion on the merits of slavery. *Pinkney vs. King.*
    - b. Burrill's amendment.
    - c. Thomas' amendment.
    - d. The committee of conference.
  4. The Compromise of 1820.
    - a. Final debate and comment. *John Randolph and the Compromise.*
    - b. The bill passed.
- IV. After the First Compromise.
  1. Popular response.
    - a. Comment of individuals and press in different sections.
    - b. Apparent effect upon the anti-slavery movement.
  2. The constitutional convention in Missouri.
    - a. Expression of delegates' opinion on the compromise.
    - b. Treatment of the free-negro question.
  3. Congressional specification as to free-negro question (called "The Second Missouri Compromise").
    - a. Constitutionality of this procedure.
    - b. Action of Missouri.
  4. The electoral count (a third compromise).
    - a. Opinion as to its propriety.
- V. Effect of the Compromise.
  1. Supposed finality.
  2. New questions.
  3. Discontent of south.
  4. Violation of the compromise.

With his outline before him the student now begins to *take notes*. These should be written neatly, in ink, on one side of papers (which are much cheaper than cards) preferably about 5½ in. x 8½ in., running lengthwise of the page, liberal margins being left at the sides, and an entry being made at the top of each paper as to particular *sub-topic developed by the notes on that sheet*, and *book and page references for each item* put in the margin. Each paper, then, is like a pigeon-hole into which is placed all the matter coming under one sub-head of the outline, as it is gleaned from different sources. In a more extensive essay it would doubtless be advantageous to give a separate sheet of paper for each note, properly labelling each, of course, according to the outline scheme, but in a work of the size here contemplated probably the best method is to read through one account at a time distributing the items of fact or comment

each to its appropriate paper, modifying the outline—possibly to the extent of complete rearrangement—and consequently his note-sheets, as experience may suggest.

For example, on beginning the narrative of the compromise in Carr's *Missouri*, the reader finds an account of the number of free and slave states immediately before 1820. He, of course, puts this on his paper marked "Balanced condition of the Union"; (if his outline did not happen to contain this sub-topic, he would now supply the omission). This paper would then look something like this:

Balanced condition of the Union

Carr	Mississippi's admission, 1817, made 10 slave and 10
<i>Missouri</i>	free. Ill., Dec. 1818; Ala., Dec. 1819; balance kept
p. 139	without stipulations imposed. Mo. applies for admission (as slave state).

If in some other book there is found something more upon the "Balanced condition of the Union", it will naturally be recorded, with its reference citation, on this same paper. If there are a number of notes on this sub-topic another paper similarly headed will be used. On page 142 of Carr's book there is a discussion of arguments against the Tallmadge amendment; on page 143, arguments in favor; on page 147, observations on violation of the compromise. All these will be recorded on their appropriate papers, the notes on these sub-topics to be supplemented from other books. Sometimes an extract, especially a quotation from a contemporary, is better directly transcribed in full than abstracted.

At the end a single paper may look thus:



John Randolph and the Compromise.

McMaster, Vol. V p. 591	When in com. of conference 18 northerners changed to vote vs. restriction, R. calls them "dough-faces", a name used for 40 yrs. to denote northern men with southern principles.
<i>Annals of Congress</i> 1819-1821 pp. 1588-1590	Morning after compromise passed R. moved reconsideration while bill still in Speaker Clay's hands. Declared out of order while morning's business unsettled. Clay, alarmed, sent bill post-haste to Senate and said no jurisdiction.
J. Q. Adams <i>Memoirs</i> , V, 4.	R. never forgave Clay for this trickery.
same, V, 277	"Floyd and Randolph were for bringing Missouri into the Union by storm, by bullying a majority into a minority."
Hildreth, VI, 691 <i>et seq.</i>	R. calls comp. a "dirty bargain".
H. Adams <i>Randolph</i> , pp. 272-274	R. though claiming to detest slavery believed in self-determination for states and hated Clay who bent all to nationalism. (See notes on Clay.)

Sometimes the student will find he has put an item under a heading less appropriate than some other; by the use of scissors, pins and paste-pot he may easily transfer it to its proper place. After all this work has been done, he will arrange his papers in the order he intends to follow in writing, and *submit the notes to the instructor* for criticism.

When the notes are returned the student has before him the material for his essay, and it will not be found difficult to write when he so obviously has something to say. But to write well is nearly always difficult. In general, it will be agreed, the essay should stick to facts; it should be based upon the notes. However, the writer should make his facts his own, relate them one to another through his understanding of the tendencies at work in those times whose story he is telling, and should write his narrative with the spirit and coherence of his own style. Of course, it may occasionally be advisable to use the exact words of a book or article, in which case quotation marks should indicate the precise extent of the direct quotation. Taking for data our notes on "John Randolph and the Constitution", we may imagine ourselves constructing a narrative something like this:



This first great legislative battle in the contest for the western territories had revealed the character of the warring forces and their leaders. Those with Rufus King stood firmly for free soil in all the future states; those with Pinkney crusaded for the general spread of slavery as a blessing; John Randolph, while claiming to detest that institution, maintained the right of self determination and control for every state as guaranteed by the Constitution; Henry Clay presented an ideal which he claimed worth the sacrifice of all these principles, the solidarity of the nation achieved through compromise, and apparently he had prevailed.<sup>1</sup> Randolph, in particular, hated Clay and this unjust exaltation of the nation at the cost of states.<sup>2</sup> Those northerners who were converted by this compromiser's arguments he stigmatized as "dough faces", a name of derision and contempt which for forty years was fastened upon "northern men with southern principles".<sup>3</sup> It was a "dirty bargain" that these nationalists had made,<sup>4</sup> and should be reconsidered before it was too late.

On the morning following the final vote, while the bill lay on the Speaker's desk unsigned, Randolph rose and desired to move this reconsideration so that all restrictions might be stricken from it. In alarm Clay ruled him out of order and declared that the morning's business as set down upon the calendar must be considered first. But, in the course of this routine, while Randolph waited for his opportunity, the Speaker signed and sent the bill post-haste to the Senate. When at last the question came, he answered that the matter was no longer within the jurisdiction of the House.<sup>5</sup> This sharp practice John Randolph could never forget or forgive.<sup>6</sup> It had finally frustrated his plan to bring Missouri in by storm regardless of all opposition.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, pp. 14, 17, 18. Cf. C. Schurz, *op.cit.* pp. 172-182.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Adams, *John Randolph*, pp. 272-274.

<sup>3</sup> J. B. McMaster, *History of the People of the United States*, Vol. V, p. 591.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hildreth, *History of the United States*, Vol. pp. 691 *et seq.*

<sup>5</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 1819-1821, pp. 1588-1590.

<sup>6</sup> J. Q. Adams, *Memoirs*, Vol. V, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 277. The comment is in Adams' acrid humor: "Floyd and Randolph were for bringing Missouri into the Union by storm, by bullying a majority into a minority".

In this sample of narrative it will be noticed that the second sentence refers to matters which we suppose to have been developed earlier in the paper, say on pages 14, 17 and 18; consequently we refer to those pages as "above", using, according to custom, the Latin word *supra*, which because it is from a foreign language is Italicized; if we were asking the reader to compare this statement with something to be found later, on page 24, we would use the word *infra*. It seems well also to refer the reader to Carl Schurz's *Henry Clay* where that statesman's views on nationalism are more fully developed. Inasmuch as we desire, or at least suggest to the reader to compare what is here said with what Schurz says, we write *cf.*, which stands for the Latin word *confer*, meaning compare. But it is supposed that previously in the paper there have been references to this work, so that we say *op. cit.*, which is the abbreviation of *opere citate*, or "in the work cited". When, however the citation is to the same work as immediately before on the same page, as is the case in note seven, we use the expression *ibid.*, which is an abbreviation for the Latin word *ibidem* meaning "in the same place". In our reference to Hildreth we cite Page 691 and those immediately following as *et seq.*, which stands for *et sequentes*, having that significance. If we referred to material scattered through a book, we would write after the title the word *passim*, a verb form meaning "scattered about". When we mention for a second time an article found in a reference book or some other collection, we may give the name of the particular author and the general work and then write *loc. cit.*, for *loco citato*, "in the place cited". Errors in spelling or obvious absurd mistakes in the source or author quoted should be transcribed if you make a direct quotation, though immediately followed by the Latin word *sic* in parenthesis indicating that the original is "thus". At first it may appear that such devices are pedantic and that English words would do quite as well, but they are the standard expressions of scholarship and any departure from them would probably make for confusion rather than clearness.

But, it will be asked, why have footnotes at all? Do they not destroy the symmetry of the page, distract attention from the body of the narrative, and give the reader an uncomfortable feeling that the author takes the opportunity to display his erudition? Certainly these questions deserve a patient answer, for footnotes are not mere irritating nuisances tolerated by reason of tradition, nor are they generally set forth to gratify the writer's vanity. In the first place, in the footnotes may be given direct quotations or other information or critical statements which for some reason do not seem to fit well into the text, as is illustrated in our footnote seven. Secondly, they furnish bibliographical aid to the reader; if anything in the text so arouses his interest that he would seek more knowledge on that matter, the corresponding note, in pointing out the source on which the stated fact or judgment has been based, suggests that there, perhaps, may be found more information of a similar kind. As H. H. Bancroft once remarked, writing on this subject in his *Literary Industries*, "The historian should leave the ladder by which he has climbed". Thirdly, the self-imposed obligation to cite his authorities pro-

vides an excellent discipline for the writer himself, saving him very probably from hasty generalizations and statements that he could not prove. Blaine's *Twenty Years of Congress* is a work of considerable value, but must be read with constant caution because of the author's carelessness as to particular facts and summary judgments. "If Blaine", observes the historian Rhodes<sup>1</sup> "had felt the necessity of giving authorities in a footnote for every statement about which there might have been a question, he certainly would have written an entirely different sort of a book."

The footnotes, too, enable the well informed reader more intelligently to judge the credibility of the narrative. If the citation is to a notoriously unreliable authority, the statement will be taken as tinged with the partisanship or other inaccuracy which is known to characterize the original. The opportunities which the author cited has enjoyed as to gaining knowledge of the event, of course make his testimony more or less valuable as the case may be. This introduces the very important question as to what are sources in history and how they may differ in value.

A primary or original source is the record or testimony of one who had personal knowledge of the event, person, place or object described; or it may be an object itself which has been made by man, such as a pyramid in Egypt, or which has conditioned man's effort, such as the battle-field of Gettysburg. We are, of course, chiefly dependent on written testimony. An original source is the work of a contemporary, though that in itself is not enough, *e.g.*, the testimony of DeWitt Clinton who was governor of New York in 1820 would not be a good source on the transactions of the conference committee on the Missouri Compromise in Washington, though it might have great value as a source on the state of public opinion in New York on the compromise. We must remember that in one sentence or paragraph a writing may be an original source and in another sentence on the same page not an original source. On our specimen page two original sources are cited. The *Annals of Congress* are made up of stenographic reports taken on the spot and constitute what is probably a reliable record, as far as it goes, of what Randolph and Clay said and did in the Senate on Tuesday, March 2, 1820. John Quincy Adams as Secretary of State was closely in touch with affairs, and he might be expected to know the opinions of Randolph; later in association with Clay he, too, had to feel the lash of Randolph's tongue. His observations were jotted down each night with slight revision, and hence have much greater value than would reminiscences written by a man in old age, when his recollection would be vague and pieced out by recourse to historical material as available for the historian today as it was for him. However, Adams was a man of strong prejudices and it would be better if we had more testimony on these points to add to his; indeed, a historical fact can hardly be said to be established until we have an agreement of at least two competent witnesses. It is obvious, also, that were Adams always cool and judicial he would yet not be the very best authority on Randolph's opinion. Would it not be more satisfactory if in the manuscript letters of Randolph, such as

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<sup>1</sup> *American Historical Association Report*, 1900, Vol. I, p. 56.

those preserved in the Library of Congress, we might find his own statement on this matter? Even then it would affect its reliability if it were made to a sympathetic friend like Governor Nicholson or to some constituent, personally unknown, who had solicited a statement, or if it were made the morning before his duel with Clay in 1826, or in 1831 when he is reported to have been "weakened by age, excesses and disease." Thus even an "original source" may have greater or less value according to the circumstances.

Generally speaking, such a source when available is better than the narrative or comment even of such reputable writers as Carl Schurz, Henry Adams, McMaster or Hildreth, but practically such secondary material must, very often be employed in historical composition. One must only keep in mind that other things being equal, the value of a narrative is in direct ratio to its nearness to the original source. A fresh illustration may suffice to show this truth.

Suppose that among the archives of Connecticut there is the clerk's manuscript of a militia law passed in 1670 requiring a quarterly muster and training of all able-bodied men, and that soon after enactment the law was printed. An historian of Connecticut is sufficiently impressed as he reads this old volume to give a page and a half of the law. A special student preparing a monograph on defense in the colonial period consults this history of Connecticut and devotes perhaps a page to this measure of 1670. A scholar writing a great "monumental" work on the colonies makes mention of the law as he finds it described in this monograph. Professor A. in putting together his textbook reads among other things this standard work on colonial history and gives a few lines to Connecticut's militia as it was organized about the time of King Philip's War. A journalist, writing an article on universal military service, remembers the passage in Professor A's book and includes what he can recall of the features of the law. The Honorable B. C. D. in addressing his constituents on the Fourth of July with respect to the obligations of citizenship makes a reference to this article he has recently read in a popular magazine, which sets forth how the fathers of New England looked upon duty of all men to fight for their country. The speech is printed in the local paper and the law is discussed by Colonel E. at breakfast next morning. Mrs. E., who listens to the Colonel, is thus ten degrees removed from the original source and the liability of error in her statement to the Women's Club on this subject is very great.

But, of course, history need not be presented in strict progression according to the clock and calendar of time. As he synthesizes the data in his mind the author may conclude to abandon the chronological arrangement and treat his subject by topics, for it is possible to write in this manner history, or even biography, as has been done so admirably by P. L. Ford in his *Many-Sided Franklin* and *True George Washington*, and in Gamaliel Bradford's *Lee*. It would be possible therefore for us entirely to recast our outline as follows:



- I National enthusiasm for western settlement.
  - 1. Circumstances of settlement.
  - 2. References in contemporary literature.
  - 3. References in the compromise debate.
- II State and federal relations as discussed in the debate.
- III American Parliamentary practice as exhibited in the debate.
- IV Arguments for slavery about 1820.
- V Arguments against slavery about 1820.
- VI The free negro and citizenship as discussed in the debate.
- VII The expediency of compromise in our federal system as discussed in the debate.

Some subjects might thus be presented with superior convenience and clarity; but, in the purely topical method of synthesis, there is lost the sense of continuity and integration which are characteristics of social as well as other life.

Would it not be better to combine the advantages of the two methods by pausing here and there in the general chronological account to treat in topical expansion the controlling tendency or the theme which seems dominant in the thought of the particular day or time which has been reached? For example, when we get to III,3, in our chronological outline, we might decide that this is an appropriate place to discuss, for a little space, the idea of compromise as operative in previous American history—in the great constitutional convention, legislative contests on the tariff, etc.—just as a general summary of the contemporary views on slavery which were revealed throughout the discussion and which we have indicated in our topical scheme under items IV and V might well be set forth in connection with the famous speeches of Pinkney and King mentioned as III, 3, b, in our first outline.

In his little book on *The Writing of History* (New Haven, 1920, pp. 141-142), Professor F. M. Fling gives a clear succinct direction as to how one may include topical expansions in a chronological narrative: "Follow one series as long as it occupies the center of the stage, allowing the other series to drop out of sight. When the interest shifts to another series, drop the first, but before following the new series from the point where it impinges on the old, pick up as many of the back threads of the new series as may be necessary for the understanding of what is to follow."

When the completed essay is submitted it should be accompanied by the outline and a bibliography. In the preparation of the last the various materials should be classified as "Primary Sources" and "Other Sources" using the word source in its broadest sense. Under the former heading one should put into separate groups manuscripts, public documents, newspapers, contemporary printed accounts including pamphlets, memoirs and autobiographies, etc. In the second class should come general histories, local histories, monographs, biographies, etc. Our previous discussion of sources should make clear this scheme of classification. To give one more

example: if the career of Martin Van Buren were under examination, George Bancroft's biography written in the forties would be a primary source, because of the personal acquaintance of the author with the subject, while Edward Morse Shepard's *Life*, published in 1888, though a far more useful work, would not. With the complete citation of each book taken from your cards should go your comment on its value based on your own experience. Thus the bibliography becomes an important part of your contribution, resulting as it does from thoughtful and intelligent investigation and criticism.

In conclusion we may say that the essay should demonstrate the writer's ability to combine and digest information derived from a number of sources, and the final product should represent a work as original as that of a poet or a builder. Sentences should be rewritten until they satisfy in meaning and in sound, until the author has the feeling of the artist, that he lacks no word and no word can be spared, for scholarship and artistry, truth and power, are complementary in the great achievements of historians. The effectiveness of presentation will be carefully considered in the critic's judgment, and a paper is as likely to be sent back with a mark of "flossy", "annalistic" or "disjointed", as it is to be condemned as "thin in substance" or "conclusions unwarranted by the facts".

## The Critical Review

The critic is not a base cavalier, but the younger brother of genius. Next to invention is the power of interpreting invention; next to beauty the power of appreciating beauty.—*Margaret Fuller.*

Several times during the year the student will be called upon to prepare a paper on some historical book. If one is going to pass an honest judgment on a work it is clear that the first duty is carefully and thoroughly to read it, taking note of its important features. The author may expect this consideration from the reviewer, for a book is the fruit of toil and thought. The great Petrarch, in speaking of his letters, puts the author's case: "I desire", he says, "that my reader, whoever he may be, should think of me alone, not of his daughter's wedding, his mistress's embraces, the wiles of his enemy, his engagements, horse, lands or money. I want him to pay attention to me. If his affairs are pressing, let him postpone reading the letter, but when he does read, let him throw aside the burden of business and family cares, and fix his mind upon the matter before him. I do not wish him to carry on his business and attend to my letter at the same time. I will not have him gain without any exertion what has not been produced without labor on my part."

After careful reading, with his notes arranged in order, the reviewer begins upon his composition. In such a piece of writing it is obviously well to intrigue the attention of the prospective reader at the start by some remarks of general introduction, to lead him from concerns of his own day's routine into a mood in which he can appreciate the essay which is to be set before him. Since the book is the product of a certain human mind and inevitably bears the marks of its creator's strength or weakness, it is also desirable to discover and to state the bare facts of the author's life and the effect which his environment and the circumstances of his career were bound to have upon his views and his work. What merits, if any, have been ascribed to his work in general? What experience or preparation qualified him to undertake the task in hand? Exactly when and under what conditions was it written?

Thus equipped, the student addresses himself to the review, which is expected to accomplish two quite different ends. In the first place it is expected to furnish bibliographical information about the book, that is, not only in the beginning an accurate statement of the title, author, date, pagination, etc. (for example *Alexander Hamilton: An Essay on American Union*. By Frederick S. Oliver. London and New York, 1917—502 pp.), but a setting forth of the plan and scope of the work, a clear rehearsal of the main ideas developed and a careful report of the kind of sources and method which the author has apparently used. Were the authorities he cites really contemporaneous records of the events he here recounts? The seeming formality of such a summary



should not dissuade the reviewer from using whatever art he may possess, as an intelligible summary requires not only insight in discerning what is of primary importance, but considerable sympathy and facility to express in a few written pages the substance of a volume. It is hoped that by this practice the student will himself learn to read more intelligently.

So far his point of view has been inside the book, noting and recording its features as a work of scholarship. But this is not all, nor, indeed, has it brought into play the highest powers of the mind. The student must now summon his faculties of criticism wisely to evaluate what he has considered and described. He has indicated in general the author's purpose; it is now his function to sit in judgment to decide in how far that purpose has been realized. Does the book tell you what you wish to know about the subject? Do you find evidence of ill-reasoned organization, *i. e.*, a presentation of certain facts in one connection which might more logically be presented in another? Is there any material which seems to you irrelevant, or does all serve the general purpose? Does the author's style attract or repel the reader? Is there a lack or superfluity of detail, or is there just enough to make clear his pictures or his points? Does he offer a full narrative or does he presuppose the reader's knowledge of the facts, and content himself with comment? Does he seem fair in his interpretation of evidence or do his judgments seem unwarranted by the facts he cites? Why, if at all, should anyone pay money for this book and spend time in reading it? Does it succeed as well as other books you know upon this or similar subjects? Considering the many things that men and women have to do, is it wise to foster interest in such subjects? To whom would you recommend such reading, and why?

These are not questions that can be answered without thought and in thus measuring the book in the larger terms of human experience, the review will gain a value of its own. There is no need, of course, as reference to any number of *The American Historical Review* or various other journals will illustrate, for the reviewer to draw a line between description and criticism, putting into part one what the book says and into part two what is said about it. Rather, as a rule, the two will go side by side to attract or warn the general reading public for whom, it is supposed, the review is prepared.

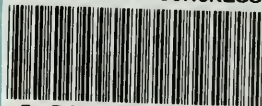
But perhaps these brief and elementary suggestions should not be brought to a close without a word of caution. From the nature of this little booklet they are intended for students and writers of comparatively small experience and it may seem that a critical review is in itself an enterprise of too much dignity for one with such equipment. Respectable criticism, it is true, will generally come from those who themselves have thought long and fruitfully upon the subjects of the works that they discuss. Even these with all their qualifications should approach a book freshly come to hand with humility and hope, for it may prove a contribution well deserving of a welcome. In Milton's phrase, "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life"; lest the work that he sets out to study should prove one of those, no critic can afford to start in flippancy or

captiousness. The exercise we here propose is not intended to make literary coxcombs, and the mind should have a reason, sincere and well-considered, before each judgment is set down. Do not too jauntily assume the role of censor. But, it may readily be admitted, experience shows that such counsel is not often necessary. Rather the novice quails before the printed page as something with a magic sacredness, and the too, too gentle reader forgets that he has rights. Even a great work may fall some short of perfection; at least it cannot be immune from shrewd analysis to find wherein its merits lie.





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